Tijana Mitanoski[1], Jovana Kojić[2], Maja Levi Jakšić[3], Sanja Marinković[4]
[1,2,3,4]University of Belgrade, Faculty of Organizational Sciences

Developing SMEs through University Support Centres: a Comparative Analysis

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As well as in many countries, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Serbia are considered to be the main generators of new jobs and "a power" for fighting unemployment. In order that they should develop successfully, many SMEs need support that universities (with their centres) can provide, which is possible only through strong collaboration between university and industry. This paper highlights the importance of university support to the SME sector development and analyzes the entrepreneurial role of universities. A comparative analysis of services provided by twenty entrepreneurship education and start-up support centres of five universities is made in order to: 1. provide a list of services that universities can offer to the SME development; 2. highlight the importance of university-industry linkage; and 3. determine where University of Belgrade and its centres stand in comparison to some of the world leading universities in the field of SME development and entrepreneurship support.

Keywords: Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), SME development, University support centres, University-industry collaboration, University of Belgrade, Serbia

1. Introduction

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a central role in the European economy. They are a major source of entrepreneurial skills, innovation and employment. (European Commission, 2005) In the enlarged European union of 27 countries, SMEs account for 99.8% of enterprises and provide an estimated 67.4% of jobs in 2012. (Wymenga, 2012) In Serbia, SMEs make up 99.8% of all enterprises; provide 65.3% of jobs and make 65.5% of total turnover. (MFE, 2012) In other words, many countries (both developed and developing) now see SMEs as an instrument for fighting poverty and underdevelopment and are redirecting their economic policies towards the development of this class of enterprises. (Hassan & Olaniran, 2011)

Nevertheless, regarding the fact that SMEs lack resources for their growth (even though their importance for the economic growth of countries is unquestionable), it is "a must" to provide development support for them. Therefore, university centres that provide development support services to SMEs may play a vital role in the economic growth of a country. The importance of university-industry links is emphasized nowadays and has attracted widespread attention among researchers in recent years (Othman & Omar, 2012).

This paper focuses on university centres that support SMEs' development. A comparative analysis is made in order to determine the position of Belgrade University support centres, in comparison to the leading universities in the field of entrepreneurship support. Section 2 of this paper gives the definition of SME sector in Serbia, and compares the Serbian to the EU SME sector. Section 3 highlights the importance of SME sector development support, i.e. of university-industry collaboration. Section 4 gives a comparative analysis of University support centres' services provided to SMEs – Belgrade University vs. the leading universities in entrepreneurship support. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. SME sector: EU vs. Serbia

The term "SME" encompasses a broad spectrum of definitions. The definitions vary from country to country. (Pandya, 2012) According to the EU definition, which is accepted as the official one in Serbia, the category of SMEs is made up of enterprises that employ fewer than 250 persons and that have an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million euro, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million euro. (Euro-

pean Commission, 2005) Another definition of SMEs that is widely used is the one made according to the number of employees – micro enterprises: up to 9 employees, small enterprises: 10 – 49 employees and medium-sized enterprises: 50 – 249 employees. (Povrenović, 2011) In Serbia, micro enterprises account for 96.3% of all SMEs. (MFE, 2012)

On average, SMEs in Serbia employ 7.3 workers, which is significantly higher in comparison with the 4.5 EU average, suggesting a need to do more to develop Serbia's framework conditions for entrepreneurship. (European Commission, 2012) SMEs in Serbia are concentrated in the business service sector, followed by trade, transport, tourism, construction and manufacturing. (Povrenović, 2011) The performance of SMEs across the EU is measured with the help of three main indicators: the number of enterprises, their output via their gross value added (GVA) and the number of employees on their payroll. (Wymenga et al., 2012) The SME sector in Serbia is near the EU average, regarding the share in the number of enterprises (99.4% in Serbia, 99.8% in the EU), employment (59.7% in Serbia, 66.9% in the EU), as well as the turnover and GVA (50.1% in Serbia, 58.4% in the EU). (European Commission, 2012) However, there is a big gap in the Serbian SME sector compared to the EU average regarding sales per employee, GVA per employee and profit per employee. (Povrenović, 2011) At the same time, a comparative analysis of investment per employee (4,100 EUR in Serbia, 7,400 EUR in the EU) and investment per company (12,200 EUR in Serbia, 31,700 EUR in the EU) in the neighbouring countries and the EU-27 shows significantly lower levels of these indicators in Serbia - in both the SME sector and in the overall economy.

3. SME sector development support: university – industry collaboration

Recent studies show that economic growth of any country is closely linked with SME development. As noted by Beck et al. (2004), there is a robust, positive relationship between the relative size of the SME sector and the economic growth of a country. Also, Ayyagari (2007) noted that the contribution of formal SMEs in high–income countries amount to almost 50% of GDP on an average. It is also important to note that a majority of employment generation is achieved through the growth of SME sector only (Ardic et al., 2011).

In order to generate enough income to help minimize the incidence of high level poverty in most developing economies, international funding bodies and economic growth analysts have suggested to policymakers in developing economies to make greater efforts in promoting the private sector development with SMEs being at the forefront (Snodgrass & Winkler, 2004; Agyapong, 2010) In addition, substantial help to the SME sector development can be provided by university support centres, since the entrepreneurial role of universities is nowadays seen as a crucial one. In their work, Collinson and Quinn (2002) determine and explain the impact of university-industry collaboration on SME growth. So, good cooperation between companies and universities is very important for the prosperity of a country. As noted by Phillipot et al. (2011), together with the dual mission of teaching and research, university must adopt the third mission of contributing to economic development, and by that become an "entrepreneurial university" – i.e. a university that embraces its role within the triple helix model and adopts the mission of contributing to regional/national development.

Incubators, as representatives of university centres that help SME development have become an omnipresent phenomenon in many parts of the world and are viewed as a tool for promoting the development of technology-based growth firms. (Bergek & Norrman, 2008) Different authors have tried to identify and classify different types of collaborations that may arise between industry and universities. Howard (2005) has proposed a comprehensive classification to understand the possible types of interactions. His framework identifies university core activities, outputs and key deliverables to the community. Flores et al. (2009) point out that the local university has a key role in developing new collaborative environments. In the study, they proposed a methodology for benchmarking different initiatives carried out by universities to develop new successful collaborative environments, by identifying critical success factors. Levi Jakšić et al. (2012a) emphasize that one of the crucial roles of university today, as related to direct impacts on the economy, is the entrepreneurial one. They presented a spectrum of university activities in relation to the direct/indirect entrepreneurial impact on the economy, where 1. Creation of technology parks, 2. Spin-off firm formation and 3. Patenting and licensing were identified as the most important entrepreneurial activities. It should be noted that the educational and research and development roles of the university are also evolving towards more entrepreneurial oriented goals (Levi Jakšić et al., 2012b). Phillipot et al. (2011) conducted a research to provide a deeper insight into the views of the academic community regarding the entrepreneurial university ideal and to examine how the concept manifests itself within the European university context. Alongside

with this new understanding of the importance of entrepreneurial role of universities, a number of academic studies have recognised that collaboration between the three institutional spheres of industry, academia and state is critical to improving regional and national systems of innovation, and by that to the economic growth of countries (see e.g. Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Motohashi, 2005; Phillipot et al., 2011).

4. Comparative analysis of University support centres' services provided to SMEs: Belgrade University vs. the world leading universities in the field of entrepreneurship support

The aim of this analysis is to highlight the ranges of SMEs' development support services provided by Universities support centres. In Table 2, authors present a comparative analysis of services provided by twenty entrepreneurship education and start-up support centres of the following five universities: University of Belgrade (UB), Lomonosov Moscow State University, University of Edinburgh, University of Central Florida and Monterrey Institute of Technology. For this comparative analysis, authors have made sa election of these universities because of: 1. the success of the investigated universities centres in the field of entrepreneurship support, 2. quantity of available information, and 3. possibility of their comparison based on the data available on the official web-sites of the university centres (also see Appendix 1). In Table 1 authors provide a short explanation of each university centre's goal and purpose. The abbreviations given in Table 1 are used for the comparative analysis given in Table 2.

Table 1: University support centres' roles and activities

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE
The Business Technology Incubator of Technical Faculties (BITF) has been established as a partnership between four technical faculties of the University of Belgrade. The main goal of the Incubator is to support start-ups' development in the form of subsidized overhead, administrative assistance and business counselling. **Innovation Centre (IC) of Electrical Engineering Faculty** is an organization that applies scientific results in order to produce new or improved existing products, processes and services. The main task is to implement scientific technical and technological knowledge in order to improve technological resources of the Republic of Serbia. **Entrepreneurship Centre (EC)** is a consulting organisation specialised in the development of entrepreneurship and SME through its programmes and projects. **Centre for Technology Transfer (CTT)** is established to help researchers at the University of Belgrade, by providing a number of services in the area of intellectual property.
LOMONOSOV MOSCOW STATE UNIVERSITY
Innovation Studio (iStudio) fosters academic entrepreneurship by teaching students the basics of entrepreneurship in the field of high technology and by assisting in translating ideas into business projects. iStudio leverages projects potential through partnerships with world known brands in innovation business. **The International Centre for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (ICIE)** contributes to the development of innovative culture and entrepreneurial environment and fosters the growth of entrepreneurship by providing support in establishing innovative companies and developing innovative projects. **MSU Science park (SP)** creates favourable starting conditions for scientists, students and graduates, who plan to create spin-off companies as well as provides assistance to entrepreneurs and SMEs in the high-tech area. **Business Incubator (BI)** represents an infrastructure platform for the creation and development of innovative projects in various fields of science and business. It supports business at an early stage of the project and creates intensive development of the business in the shortest possible time. **Technology transfer centre MSU (TTC)** promotes commercialization of scientific research and customizes training of specialists in the field of innovative entrepreneurship and technology transfer.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
LAUNCH.ED is a free service, provided by the University of Edinburgh as part of Edinburgh Research and Innovation centre for its students, to support the formation of start-up and spin-out companies. **The Edinburgh Technology Transfer Centre (ETTC)** is a joint venture between the University and the City of Edinburgh Council. The Centre is committed to providing an effective and facilitating bridge between the University's research labs and the business world. **Edinburgh Technopole (ET**) is a science and technology park whose main role is to create an entrepreneurial community with a mixture of high growth technology SMEs and large corporate R&D centres.
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA
Office of Technology Transfer (OTT) is responsible for managing the University of Central Florida's (UCF) intellectual property assets, and supporting the commercialization of discoveries made at UCF. It collaborates with industry partners to bring its researchers' discoveries to the marketplace guiding the technologies and their inventors through the patenting, marketing, and licensing processes. **VentureLab** represents an initiative for providing entrepreneurs with an access to experienced business coaches that can assist them in the pre-business steps critical for the successful launch of technology firms. **UCF Business Incubation Program (BIP)** consists of 9 Business incubators that are providing early stage companies with the enabling tools, training and infrastructure to create financially stable high growth/impact enterprises. In 2004 the UCF Technology Incubator was named Incubator of the Year by the National Business Incubation Association. **Economic Gardening program (GrowFL)** supports the growth of the existing second-stage businesses. It is an innovative entrepreneur-centred growth strategy that offers services for entrepreneurial support to organizations throughout Florida and by delivering critical research and strategy support. **The Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI)** is the UCF's centre for educating and empowering the entrepreneurial spirit. The CEI offers a range of opportunities to promote entrepreneurial thinking within members of the UCF community. **Small Business Development Centre (SBDC)** contributes to Central Florida's economic growth by providing high-quality management advice and business training through the collaboration of higher education and economic development organizations.
MONTERREY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
The Business Incubator Network (BIN) of the Monterrey Institute of Technology offers support for the creation and development of new businesses. Business incubator network comprises 102 incubators: 25 Intermediate technology business incubators, 8 High Technology business incubators and 69 Social Incubators distributed throughout the country, in addition to a Virtual Incubator. **Technology parks platform (TP)** represents important instruments for improving the existing infrastructure and technology, attracting foreign direct investment, commercialization of innovation and balanced regional development. There are currently 16 technology parks of the Monterrey Institute of Technology that offer a range of services through professional management experts specialized in the management of technology and high value-added activities. **Product Design and Innovation Centre (CIDEP)** gives support in establishing companies of high technology and in providing technology solutions to small and medium-sized Mexican companies and companies in incubation.

Table 2 shows the relations between different centres of each university and different services that they provide. The intention of the authors is to find out: 1. which services are needed worldwide, and are not provided by UB support centres, and 2. which services the UB support centres recognized as crucial and offered to companies, i.e. to find out similarities and differences in services offered by these university centres. In other words, the main goal is to determine where the UB and its centres stand in comparison with the the four leading universities that have been chosen according to their involvement in entrepreneurial support services which are institutionalized. Another goal is to provide guidance and inspiration to universities that want to support SMEs, and to the policy makers that stand behind them.

Table 2: Comparative analysis of University support centres' services provided to SMEs: Entrepreneurial and innovation services, Technology transfer services and Additional services

University	University of Belgrade	Lomonosov Moscow State University	University of Edinburgh	University of Central Florida	Monterrey Institute of Technology
Entrepreneurship and innovation					
Educational programs, seminars, conferences, workshops, trainings	BITF, IC, EC	iStudio, ICIE, SP, BI	LAUNCH.ED, ETTC, ET	VentureLab, BIP, GrowFL, CEI, SBDC	BIN
Consulting/ Advisory	BITF, EC	iStudio, ICIE, SP	LAUNCH.ED, ET	VentureLab, BIP, GrowFL, CEI, SBDC	BIN, TP
Coaching/ Mentoring	BITF	iStudio, BI	LAUNCH.ED	VentureLab, BIP, CEI	BIN
Incubation for start-ups*	BITF	ICIE, BI	ETTC	BIP	BIN, TP
Virtual incubation**	BITF				BIN
Assist in marketing, PR and branding activities	CTT, BITF, EC	TTC, BI		BIP, SBDC	BIN, CIDEP
Legal advice	BITF	BI	LAUNCH.ED, ET	BIP	BIN
Accounting services	BITF	SP	LAUNCH.ED	BIP, SBDC	
Support to social entrepreneurship projects					BIN
Help in finding partners or employees for entrepreneurial business projects		ICIE, SP		BIP, GrowFL	BIN, TP, CIDEP
Finding and attracting funds to projects	BITF	ICIE,SP, BI	ETTC	OTT, VentureLab, BIP	BIN, TP
Conduct research in innovation/ entrepreneurship	IC, EC	ICIE		VentureLab, GrowFL, CEI	
Partnerships with national or international innovation and entrepreneurial centres		ICIE		OTT, VentureLab, BIP, CEI, GrowFL, SBDC	BIN
Support export activities of tenants	BITF	ICIE		SBDC	
Organize competitions related to entrepreneurship		BI	LAUNCH.ED	CEI	
Publishing activity	EC				

University	University of Belgrade	Lomonosov Moscow State University	University of Edinburgh	University of Central Florida	Monterrey Institute of Technology
Technology transfer					
Seminars and workshops on issues related to technology transfer and entrepreneurship		TTC		VentureLab	
Advice on protection of intellectual property	BITF, CTT	TTC, SP	LAUNCH.ED	OTT, VentureLab, BIP	CIDEP
Consulting on the administration and management of intellectual property	CTT, BITF	TTC, SP		OTT, BIP, SBDC	CIDEP
International Summer School		TTC			
Distance Education		TTC			
Technology licensing	CTT	TTC		OTT	CIDEP
Supporting creation of technology companies based on university technology	BITF, IC	TTC		OTT	TP
Grants		TTC	ETTC, ET	VentureLab, CEI, SBDC	
Evaluating commercial potential of research outputs	CTT		LAUNCH.ED	OTT, VentureLab	CIDEP
Support commercialization of research results and promising technologies	BITF,CTT	TTC, SP	LAUNCH.ED	OTT	TP, CIDEP
Create a database with available technologies	CTT	TTC		OTT	CIDEP
Develops and implements policies and procedures for University in intellectual property		TTC			
Stimulate joint initiatives between the university, industry and other organizations in science and technology	CTT	TTC		OTT, BIP	BIN, CIDEP

University	University of Belgrade	Lomonosov Moscow State University	University of Edinburgh	University of Central Florida	Monterrey Institute of Technology
Conducts research on the development of innovation and technology transfer;	CTT, IC	TTC		SBDC	
Organize or assist competitions in research and innovation projects	CTT	TTC		BIP, CEI	
Develop international cooperation and collaboration in the field of technology transfer, research and innovation	IC	TTC			CIDEP
Business plan preparation				OTT, VentureLab, BIP, SBDC	BIN
Additional services					
Access to a high-tech science labs	IC	SP, BI	LAUNCH.ED, ETTC, ET	BIP	BIN, TP
Co-working space		iStudio			
Working offices	BITF	ICIE, SP	LAUNCH.ED, ETTC, ET	BIP	BIN, TP
Equipped rooms for conferences, seminars, meetings	BITF	iStudio,ICIE,SP, BI	ETTC, ET	BIP	BIN, TP
Internal infrastructure: Wi-Fi, fax / phone, office equipment	BITF, IC	iStudio,ICIE,SP, BI	LAUNCH.ED, ETTC, ET	VentureLab,BIP	BIN, TP
Access to (online) library			LAUNCH.ED, ET	VentureLab, BIP, CEI	TP
Internships for students	IC		LAUNCH.ED	VentureLab, BIP, CEI	BIN, TP

* Facilitate the birth and growth of small businesses by providing the necessary resources (management consulting, infrastructure, social network, seed financing).

**Incubation program for non-resident clients.

Services that are analyzed are divided into three main areas: Entrepreneurship and innovation, Technology transfer and Additional services. This analysis suggests that there are four key areas of services provided by the majority of the analysed universities' centres: 1. Educational programs, seminars, conferences, workshops, trainings; 2. Consulting/Advisory; 3. Coaching/Mentoring and 4. Finding and attracting funds to projects. The centres may provide some of these services themselves, or they may rely on networking with other organisations.

In comparison with other analysed universities, the UB and its centres lack the support services in the following areas: 1. Entrepreneurship and innovation: Support to social entrepreneurship projects, Help in finding partners or employees for entrepreneurial business projects, Partnerships with national or international innovation and entrepreneurial centres, and Organising competitions (related to entrepreneurship); 2. Technology transfer: Seminars and workshops on issues related to technology transfer, International summer school, Distance education, Developing and implementing policies and procedures for University in intellectual property, and Providing grants. It is obvious that the missing services are actually those that are the imperative of today's business world.

Based on the analysis, the services that are poorly provided by the UB centres and that need to be upgraded are: Publishing activities, Stimulate joint initiatives between the university, industry and other organizations in science and technology, Develop international cooperation and collaboration in the field of technology transfer, Research and innovation, Providing Working offices or Co-working spaces and Providing internships for students.

Conslusion

Since the SME sector forms the backbone of the world's economy today, increasing the number of strong and successful SMEs is vital for improving Serbian economy. Therefore, it is important to undertake activities in creating new and stimulating growth of the existing SMEs. Since the graduates and researchers are the key resource when it comes to commercialization of new ideas based on technical and economic skills, cooperation with universities is of incalculable value to sustainable regional development. Supporting new and small enterprises to overcome the initial period through University SME support centres is an opportunity for creating new jobs, decreasing unemployment and supporting economic development. In this area there is a chance for local agencies, institutions and authorities to show that they are willing to take concrete actions and to support the University's efforts and future projects for supporting SMEs.

In the comparative analysis given in Section 4 of this paper, the authors have provided a list of services that universities can offer to SMEs. It is, however, important to point out that this list is infinite and can always be extended. Secondly, the authors have shown where UB stands in comparison with the leading "entrepreneurial universities": Lomonosov Moscow State University, University of Edinburgh, University of Central Florida and Monterrey Institute of Technology. It turns out that UB provides the same spectrum of main support services as the leading universities do, but lacks providing support services in some of the most important topics in today's business. UB should take a proactive approach to support business incubation of new start-ups by encouraging and facilitating research and innovation activities, increasing the number of provided services in the existing centres and establishing new centres specialised in fostering SMEs. The value added of University centres' operations lies in the type, range and quality of business support services provided to clients. Developing this aspect of centres' operations should be a key priority in the future.

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Appendix 1 – Links used for collecting data about University support centres

University of Belgrade: 1. http://www.bg.ac.rs/en_index.php 2. http://www.bitf.rs/cms/item/about/en.html 3. http://www.ctt.bg.ac.rs/en/ 4. http://icef.etf.bg.ac.rs/ 5. http://www.ekof.bg.ac.rs/visitors/enterprise.htm University of Edinburgh: 1. http://www.ed.ac.uk/business 2. http://www.ncee.org.uk/publication/EUotY1112.pdf 3. http://www.launch.ed.ac.uk/index.aspx 4. http://www.ncee.org.uk/publication/EUotY1112.pdf 5. http://www.ettc.co.uk/index.asp 6. http://www.edinburghtechnopole.co.uk/	Lomonosov Moscow State University: 1. http://www.msu.ru/en/, http://www.innovationstudio.ru/ 2. http://www.ctt.msu.ru/about 3. http://wwe.icie.econ.msu.ru/ 4. http://www.sciencepark.ru/eng/index.htm 5. http://www.incubator-msu.ru/ Technologico de Monterrey: 1. http://www.itesm.edu 2. http://www.itesm.edu/wps/wcm/connect/ITESM/Tecnologico+de+Monterrey/English/Entrepreneurship/?cache=none 3. http://idem.uab.es/treballs%20recerca/Eduardo%20Gajon%20Mexic.pdf	University of Central Florida: 1. http://tt.research.ucf.edu/AboutUs/tabid/58/Default.aspx 2. http://www.incubator.ucf.edu/incubationprogram/faq.html 3. http://www.growfl.com/about 4. http://www.cei.ucf.edu/ 5. http://www.bus.ucf.edu/sbdc/ 6. http://cfrp.org/ 7. http://www.incubator.ucf.edu/aboutus/documents/FINALTechnical%20Report%20%20-%20Jan%202012.pdf 8. http://www.incubator.ucf.edu/aboutus/documents/UCF%20Incubator%20Impacts%20Sep%2009%20revised.pdf

About the Author

Tijana Mitanoski
University of Belgrade, Faculty of Organizational Sciences

Tijana Mitanoski (B.Sc. Management) is currently enrolled in master studies - Management of development at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences. She did part of her undergratuates studies studying at Monterrey Institute of Technology in Mexico and CITY College, International Faculty of the University of Sheffield in Greece. Her area of interest includes international business, innovation management and entrepreneurship.

Jovana Kojic
University of Belgrade, Faculty of Organizational Sciences
jovana.kojic@fon.bg.ac.rs

Jovana Kojic (B.Sc. Information systems and technologies) works as a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, Department for Technology, Innovation and Development Management. She is currently enrolled in master studies - Management of development. Her research and teaching area of interest includes technology and innovation management and SMEs development.

Sanja Marinkovic
University of Belgrade, Faculty of Organizational Sciences
marinkovic.sanja@fon.bg.ac.rs

Sanja Marinkovic, PhD is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, Department for Technology, Innovation and Development Management. She is the author and co-author of several books and more than 60 scientific papers. She is a lecturer and link tutor at dual award master programme International Business and Management, validated by Middlesex University, London. Her research and teaching interests are in the fields of technology and innovation management, sustainable development and SMEs development.

Maja Levi Jaksic
University of Belgrade, Faculty of Organizational Sciences
levi-jaksic.maja@fon.bg.ac.rs

Maja Levi Jaksic, PhD is full professor at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, head of Department for Technology, Innovation and Development Management. She has been teaching as visiting professor at universities in Greece, United Kingdom, Japan, and France and is dual diploma Master programme leader with Middlesex University from London. Prof Levi Jaksic has published more than 20 books and monographs, about eighty articles in journals and more than ninety papers in proceedings of domestic and international scientific conferences. She has also been a project leader and member of about twenty domestic and international scientific projects. She is a member of the Editorial Board of Technovation.